DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 005 CE 073 096

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TITLE Can We Really Make a Difference?
INSTITUTION World Education, Inc., Boston, MA. New England Literacy Resource Center.
PUB DATE 1996-09-00
NOTE 27p.; Theme issue. Published biannually.
AVAILABLE FROM World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210 (back issues, $2.50; one year subscription, $5 plus $2 shipping and handling). Fax: 617-482-0617; Web site: http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent. For full text: http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/pdf/issue3.pdf.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Change Agent; n3 Sep 1996
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Activism; Adult Basic Education; Advocacy; *Citizen Participation; Citizenship Education; *Citizenship Responsibility; *Civics; *Community Action; Crime; Economics; Foreign Policy; Gun Control; Immigrants; Immigration; Voting Rights
IDENTIFIERS Foreign Aid

ABSTRACT

This issue is intended as a collection of teaching and learning resources. It presents news, issues, information, ideas, activities, and discussion questions on social justice. Articles that focus on learning how to make a difference areas follows: "What Is Civic Participation Anyway?"; "The Hundredth Monkey: When You're Not Sure, Keep Washing Your Sweet Potatoes"; "Who Makes the Decisions that Affect You?"; and "What Is the Right Question Project? What Does It Do for People? How Does It Work?" These articles deal with making a difference in the local community: "Politicians 'Walk-a-Mile' in the Shoes of Welfare Recipients"; "Persistence Pays Off: Enrique Helps Draft a Law in California to Protect Low-Literacy Workers"; "Students Fight for Public Transportation; "Students Speak Out for Adult Education in Vermont"; "Community-Building in an English as a Second Language Classroom"; "Community Garden"; "What Support Do Students Need in Order to Make a Difference?"; "Taking Action against Violence"; and "Controlling Our Economic Destiny: An Update on the Mountain Women Soap Company." Articles on voting and advocacy are as follows: "Voter Power"; "The Long Struggle for Women to Get the Right to Vote"; "Voter Education in the Asian Community"; "Unveiling the Mysteries of Voting"; "What If Rosa Parks Shot the Bus Driver?"; "A Key to Combining Voter Education and Economics"; "An Adult Basic Education Class Moves into the Rhode Island State House"; "Quiz: How Does Your Political Knowledge Compare with that of Other Americans"; "Immigrant Students Advocate for Adult Education"; and "Education Gives Us Wings." The final series of articles deals with selected presidential election issues: "The Economy Is Doing Well, But What about the Average Worker?"; "New Bedford Students Question Decision-Makers About the Economy"; "Is Big Money Doing Away with Real Democracy?"; "Just How Much Does Foreign Aid Cost Us?"; "National Issues Forum: Seeing All Sides of the Issue of Crime"; "Myths and Facts about Gun Control and Crime"; "Students Speak Out on Crime"; "Immigrants under Attack: Is New Legislation Punishing Immigrants Unjustly?";

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"The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship"; and "Myths and Facts about Immigration." (YLB)

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Can We Really Make a Difference?

Silja Kallenback, Editor

The Change Agent
n3 Sep 1996

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THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues & Ideas

September 1996 Issue 3

FOCUS ON
Can We Really Make A Difference?

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Published by the New England Literacy Resource Center, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210

What is Civic Participation Anyway?

By Silja Kallenbach

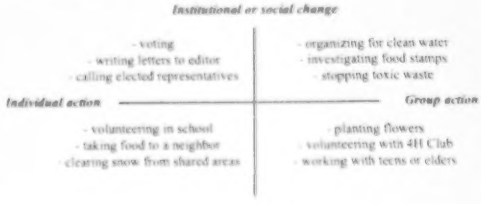
Over the past nine months we at the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) have asked adult learners, teachers, administrators, activists and policy makers: What does civic participation mean to you as a parent, student, worker and community member? In some classes, we asked: Did you ever get involved in helping someone here or in your country? How did you help?

Answers to these and other questions are part of a bigger project that NELRC is doing with the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee. In this project we are finding out what people need to know and do in order to be active as citizens or members of their communities by talking to people who are active citizens. Students in nine programs in New England and Appalachia have also participated in this investigation through readings, discussions and action projects. Our goal is to develop recommendations of what kinds of skills and knowledge adult education programs should teach related to civic participation and how they should teach them.

Some of the teachers with whom we worked were surprised to find out how many of their students were active in their communities, or had been active in their native countries. Then again, they had never asked them about civic participation before. What they found out was that many students have been active at the neighborhood level in crime watches, clean-ups, vigils against violence, and, in general, helping their neighbors. Many students are active as parents, and many do vote. It is also true that many students have become more active through their participation in adult education programs or tutoring.

What is clear from the examples of students making a difference in this issue of *The Change Agent* is that many teachers are already fostering civic participation. We just have not called it that. Instead, we are more used to talking about concepts like empowerment. Civic participation is a form of empowerment that begins with the self. It is about people helping other people, or working together to solve problems in the community or the society at large through collective or individual action. The concept of civic participation implies taking action at some point "to make life around us better," as one student put it.

In the course of our project, we have come to an understanding that civic participation includes actions on a continuum that ranges from individual to collective actions that result in personal or social and institutional change. We believe that people get involved in many forms of civic participation. These actions often reinforce each other. Examples of such actions are helping your neighbor, volunteering in a soup kitchen, voting, and participating in organized efforts to bring about social or institutional change. I have found the following diagram, developed by my colleagues at the Center for Literacy Studies helpful:


Institutional or social change
- voting
- writing letters to editor
- calling elected representatives
- organizing for clean water
- investigating food stamps
- stopping toxic waste
Individual action
Group action
- volunteering in school
- taking food to a neighbor
- clearing snow from shared areas
- planting flowers
- volunteering with 4H Club
- working with teens or elders
Personal impact

In the course of our investigation, we also heard from many students about barriers that stand in their way of becoming active citizens. Many students feel they are not being listened to. "It's hard to take action if they don't listen to you." Or, "People won't listen to me. They will think I don't know what I'm talking about." One student said, "Women do have voice, but when you are there, there are no ears to hear." Others expressed a sentiment we all feel at one time or another: "It's hard to understand all that's going on." They also mentioned that it is not always easy to work in groups and get along. And almost everyone mentioned the barriers of time and energy that all busy people, and especially parents, feel.

These are all legitimate concerns. Some are easier to address than others. Helping people feel like they know what they are talking about is something we as adult educators can do. Teaching and modeling working together is also something we can do. But you may ask, why should we do all this? Aren't there already enough demands on teachers and students? What about the students who just want to pass the GED or learn English? On these pages of *The Change Agent*, you will read about teachers who have found ways to integrate the learning of academic skills with civic participation, and students who found it important and meaningful to take action.

Our actions may be motivated by anger, a sense of injustice, compassion or caring, but ultimately, we need to be guided by a vision of a better society. Take some time to think about your vision. Perhaps you will agree and be inspired by the student who wrote, "My dream is to stop crime and increase the peace for the kids. Stop hunger and stop the rich from getting richer. Stop the poor from getting poorer. Can we all just get along?"

~ Silja Kallenbach is the Coordinator of New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA. The Civic Participation Standards Project, to which this article refers, is funded by the National Institute for Literacy as part of its Adult Education System Reform Initiative, Equipped For the Future.

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for the Nov. 95 issue, which was full of informative topics. I would like to share with you the success we (students and teacher) had with activities adapted from the "Community Economics" article.

The lesson began by using the "money map" to reinforce the concepts of cash flow and local economies. The students classified various types of business transactions as helpful, harmful, or neutral to the health of a community.

Then, students analyzed the residential and business makeup of their own communities. Findings were compared and used as a writing topic.

The students were pleased to share the knowledge of their respective neighborhoods and to see themselves as participants in the economic cycle.

Leona Breslow
Boston, Massachusetts

.....

I am an ABE teacher working with students who are dealing with the welfare system and face economic hardship on a daily basis.

I found all of the articles in the newspaper interesting. Many can be shared with my students.

If I could change anything, it would be the format. I'd like to see 8"x11" pages which could be duplicated more easily.

Keep up the good work.

Kathleen Tunstall
Bridgeport, Connecticut

.....

I liked the last newsletter, but it was also kind of a let-down. All those great ideas, and none I can use with my (very) low-level ESL/literacy class.

My class has successfully campaigned for state funding here in Massachusetts by circulating the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) petition, attending the MCAE rally in May, and writing (very, very, very) simple letters to their congressmen. Tomorrow, our local state representative is even coming in to visit the class.

I'd love to see more in the newsletter that would be useful for ESL, and particularly low-level or literacy-level ESL students and teachers.

Lynne Weintraub
Amherst, Massachusetts

.....

THE CHANGE AGENT WELCOMES LETTERS FROM OUR READERS. LETTERS SHOULD BE SENT TO: SILJA KALLENBACH, WORLD EDUCATION, 44 FARNSWORTH STREET, BOSTON, MA 02210

THE HUNDREDTH MONKEY:

When You're Not Sure, Keep Washing Your Sweet Potatoes

Have you wondered whether what you're doing right now is making a difference? Follow this story of the hundredth monkey and then decide.

The Japanese monkey, Macaca fuscata, has been observed in the wild for a period of over thirty years. On the island of Koshima in 1952, scientists introduced a new food to monkeys. Sweet potatoes were dropped in the sand. The monkeys liked the taste of the new sweet potatoes, but found the dirt unpleasant.

An 18-month-old female monkey named Imo solved the problem by washing sweet potatoes in a nearby stream. She taught this trick to her mother and her playmates, who taught their mothers, too. This **social innovation**, in monkey terms, gradually spread before the eyes of the scientists. Only the adults who imitated their children learned this social innovation. Other adults continued to eat dirty sweet potatoes.

Then something surprising occurred. In the summer of 1958, one morning there were, let's say, 99 monkeys (the exact number is unknown) on Koshima Island who had learned to wash their sweet potatoes. Let's further say that later that day, the hundredth monkey learned.

THEN IT HAPPENED! By evening, almost everyone in the tribe was washing sweet potatoes before eating them. The added energy of this hundredth monkey somehow created a **learning breakthrough**. Apparently, there was now a **critical mass** of monkeys that had changed their behavior in order for all the rest of the monkeys to follow suit.

However, the most surprising thing was that the habit of washing sweet potatoes then spontaneously jumped across the natural barrier of the sea. Colonies of monkeys on the mainland and on other islands began washing their sweet potatoes. It seems that when a certain critical number achieves an awareness, this new awareness may be communicated from mind to mind.

You might say, "that's an interesting monkey story, but I'm a human being!" True, but consider the report in *Brain/Mind Bulletin*, August 1981, that all systems are regulated not only by known energy and material factors, but also by "invisible organizing fields." According to this concept, whenever one member of a human group learns a new behavior, consciousness of the group is changed. If the behavior is repeated for long enough, the entire group is affected. The behavior can be positive or negative.

How then does this hundredth monkey concept affect your current situation? Here are some thoughts:

- ✧ Making change begins with one person — You! Anyone can begin making a difference. Go down to the stream and wash your sweet potatoes.
- ✧ Think positive! Use your knowledge and skills with confidence.
- ✧ Lead with your own example. After Imo learned to wash sweet potatoes, she taught others.
- ✧ When you're not sure that you're getting desired results, wash more sweet potatoes. The person observing you might be the "hundredth monkey." Sometimes you can't see any progress until the 100th person washes their sweet potatoes. Don't quit, because you can't be certain which washing will result in the critical mass necessary for change.
- ✧ When others don't yet believe, just keep washing your sweet potatoes — you know they taste better without dirt and sand!

Adapted from a writing by Haywood H. Martin, Ph.D., MAC Consultant

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain what it means to be the 100th monkey.
2. What is the most important lesson from this story to you?
3. Have you ever felt like the 100th monkey? If so, why?
4. Can you think of examples of people or historical events that reflect the 100th monkey story?
5. Do you believe that thoughts can be communicated from mind to mind, even across the globe?

HARRY FIG'S NEIGHBORHOOD
BY PETER WALLACE
HARRY PARTICIPATES IN A NEIGHBORHOOD CLEANUP
LET'S GET TO WORK! YEARS OF NEGLECT HAVE LEFT THIS LOT CHOKED WITH TONS OF ROTTING GARBAGE, OLD JUNK, AND OTHER DEBRIS!
WHICH REMINDS ME — GOTTA CLEAN MY APARTMENT ONE OF THESE DAYS...

Reprinted with permission of the artist.

Who Makes The Decisions That Affect You?

By Alex Levin

Most people go to workshops to get answers. Maybe it's because they want to get more healthy, more skilled, more informed, or more organized. But getting answers isn't always the answer, not according to The Right Question Project.

The project was created by a few people working together in Lawrence, Massachusetts. They felt that one of the biggest stumbling blocks to people taking control of their lives was that, when faced with a problem, people simply did not ask the right questions. Sometimes people didn't even know they had the right to ask questions.

Six years ago, the project started by offering training for parents that would help them get involved in improving their children's chances of getting a better education. And according to The Right Question Project, it all naturally starts with questions like these:

What should my child be learning?
Is the teacher teaching what my child should be learning?
Is my child learning what he or she should be learning?
If not, what can I do?

"In our workshops, parents discover the great power of questions," says Dan Rothstein, the project's executive director. "They use them as a tool to support their children's education and when necessary, to speak on behalf of them and to advocate for their needs."

The project also designs trainings that help communities to take action. In Hawaii, the project worked with a community of workers on a sugar cane plantation that was about to move their jobs overseas. For close to a hundred years, the lives of those families revolved around the plantation which, in addition to jobs, had also provided housing and healthcare.

"We could not help them get the sugar company to stay," says Rothstein, "But after two days of The Right Question Project training, the residents of that Hawaiian community knew what and whom they needed to ask." The workers asked:

What kind of jobs would replace the plantation work?
How could the land of the plantation be used so they could still live there?
Who is eligible to get company-owned housing?

This process of asking questions helped them see that they needed to be involved in all these decisions. The training also helped them come up with a plan for getting involved. By the end of the training, the workers knew they had the skill to keep on asking the "right" questions.

Most of The Right Question Project's original work took place in Massachusetts with various school systems. Through private and federal grants, they moved on to work with groups from Providence to Chicago and now beyond to Kentucky.

Currently, they are working on a project to get people thinking about how candidates get elected to office.

Who pays for their campaign?
Who has influence over the candidates after they are elected?
What decisions do they make?
How are we affected by those decisions?
Can we have influence on those decisions, if we did not pay for the campaigns?

"We are designing this workshop," says Rothstein, "because we believe more people need to have a chance to influence how decisions are made in government. We especially want to see more people participate who may have never even voted before."

Questions deserve answers. If you do not ask questions, you may never get the answers you need.

Asking questions is not the final step, but it is the most important step people should take when first facing a problem, and a valuable tool that they can return to again and again, until that problem is solved.

See article "New Bedford Students Question Decision-Makers About the Economy" on page 17 about how one program used The Right Question Method.

What is The Right Question Project? What does it do for people? How does it work?

By Dan Rothstein, Executive Director of The Right Question Project

Have you ever been in a situation where you did not know quite what to ask? Have you ever thought of an important question you wanted to ask, but it was already too late to ask it? If you have ever felt this way, then you understand why figuring out the right question to ask is so important.

The Right Question Project designs trainings to help people figure out the right questions to ask and to think about the ways in which important decisions are made. In our trainings, people learn about:

1. What decisions are being made that affect us?
2. What decisions and decision-making processes should we be paying attention to, and how do we pay attention to them?
3. What information do we need and how do we get it?
4. What kind of decisions do we want made? How do we check or monitor if our needs are being met?
5. What should we do to have a say and try to make a difference?

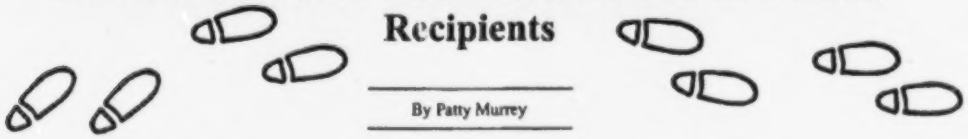
We have seen in many different situations that figuring all this out begins with figuring out what questions we need to ask. We never tell people what to think. We do not give people information that tells them what they should do. We believe that if people have a chance to think for themselves, there is a lot they can figure out on their own.

Is that all? Is it just about learning to ask questions? It seems simple, and it is. It also can be helpful in many amazing ways. But figuring out what to ask can also be difficult to do by yourself. That's why we work with groups of people. The more people have a chance to learn from each other, the better ideas they produce.

We are eager to learn from people and share examples of questions that have helped them advocate for themselves. We welcome your thoughts and examples.

For more information call The Right Question Project at 617-628-4070.

Politicians "Walk-A-Mile" in the Shoes of Welfare Recipients



By Patty Murrey

When I found out that the New Hampshire public office-holders — those who make the laws and rules for the welfare system — were going to be involved in "Walk-A-Mile," a program that pairs up elected officials and AFDC recipients, I jumped at the chance to let these people know that living on the system is no picnic. I always thought that people in office were out of my reach; that I could not pick up the phone or stop into the Capitol to see them and let them know what was on my mind. But I was invited to participate in this program and had the opportunity to meet these public officials face-to-face.

A lot of politicians seem to think that people on welfare are lazy and do not want to do anything with their lives. They are wrong! Ninety percent of the people on the system want to get off but when they try, they face many obstacles. There are barriers to getting off the system such as lack of education, safe and reliable child care, and safe and reliable transportation.

People moan and complain about their tax dollars going to pay for people on welfare. But do they realize that it costs more to support someone in jail for one year than it does to support someone on welfare for one year? It costs as much as $20,000 per year to support someone in jail, but it costs $8,028 to support someone on AFDC for one year. That includes food stamps. I am not saying that people should stay home and collect AFDC. Granted there are some people on the system who do abuse it, but they make people like me look bad. When you go in to get welfare, they should test you to see what type of work you can do and would like to do, and they should help you find out about schooling or training.

As part of the Walk-A-Mile project, I was matched up with Executive Councilor Peter Spaulding. I was very nervous about meeting him. When I first met Peter, I thought he would not really care about what I had to say or what I thought about being on welfare. Boy, was I wrong! Like most of the people I met throughout this month-long project, he became involved in order to get a better understanding of what it is like to live on welfare and food stamps. He didn't know, for example, that there were some things you could not have while being on welfare.

All the participants had to live on a food stamp budget for the month. The amount of stamps they received was based on their family size. Many of them realized that it is not easy. (The amount they received was actually higher than what most of my fellow students get.) This gave the people in public office some idea of what it was like, but many of them felt they should have been made to use the actual food stamps to see what it was like to get all the dirty looks from the people in the stores and to hear what they whisper about you. I think it is important for everyone to realize that not everyone on welfare is a bad person or is going to abuse the system.

The elected officials learned a lot from us. They came with us to our classes, went shopping with us, and joined us for many of our appointments with various state agencies. I think the Walk-A-Mile project helped open their eyes to what really goes on. Now they have a face to put with those laws and reforms. President Clinton and Governor Merrill are talking a lot about welfare reform. I believe in reform. But how on earth are these people going to reform the welfare system when they have never had to live on it or count on it just to keep a roof over their children's heads and food on the table for them?

As a result of this project, I had the opportunity to talk with people in powerful positions, tell my story to print and electronic media, and share my experiences with fellow students, friends, and relatives. It gave me the chance to meet a lot of people that I would never have come in contact with in my life. Many of us who participated in this effort registered to vote and are more aware of what's happening politically.

I feel that the Walk-A-Mile Project helped make more people aware of the obstacles welfare recipients face and will bring about more thoughtful changes in the system. It would be good to have more elected and appointed officials take part, and I think all the states should participate in the program. If people go into it with open minds they will definitely learn a lot.

~ Patty Murrey is a student at Second Start Office Occupations training program in Concord, NH.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the things people can learn about welfare only through experience?
2. How are welfare recipients portrayed in the media?
3. What can be done to change the misperceptions people have of welfare recipients?

For more information on the Walk-A-Mile Project, contact Marian Cole, Walk-A-Mile Is Your Neighbor's Shoes, c/o University of Washington, 4101 15th Avenue, NE, Seattle, WA 98105-6299, (206) 543-3027, marianmc@u.washington.edu

The Maine Idea

A newspaper by Maine adult learners.

If you are interested in starting a student newspaper, find out about The Maine Idea Pilot Project. The Maine Idea is a statewide newspaper produced by learners for learners. It was founded several years ago by a group of learners. Their motto is "Everyone's Voice is Important" and their goal is to promote an adult learner voice in Maine.

The four Maine Idea Pilot Sites are:

Caribou Adult Education
Fox Islands Learners Exchange
Franklin County Adult Basic Education
Sumner Adult Education

For more information on the four Maine pilot sites, or to receive a copy of The Maine Idea, please contact Allison Pinkham, Coordinating Editor at Sumner Adult Education at RR1, Box 42, Sullivan, ME 04607, (207) 422-3889, (207) 422-3812 FAX, anns@acadia.net

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

Enrique helps draft a law in California to protect low-literacy workers

By Enrique Ramirez and Leslie Shelton

My name is Enrique Ramirez. I live in San Francisco, California. I've been a student in Project Read, a literacy program at the South San Francisco Library, since 1987. I have always been willing to speak out so that others like me can get help.

In March of 1989, I was asked to testify about the literacy needs of workers at a Joint Hearing of the California State Legislature. During my speech, I told the legislators how the literacy program at the library had changed my life so that I was able to get a better job and help my children.

The legislature decided that workforce literacy was an issue that affected the state's economy and they formed a California Workforce Literacy Task Force to study the needs of workers and businesses. I was appointed to represent adult learners on the task force.

We had our first meeting in October of 1989. It was an overwhelming and intimidating experience. The other members included presidents of companies, directors of Human Resources departments, college professors, researchers, heads of unions, an editor for the LA Times, and representatives from the state departments of employment and training, education, community colleges, and the state library. They used a lot of big words and talked in a language I couldn't understand. I started wondering what I was doing there. So finally I said, "I don't know what you guys are talking about." Then they started to include me in the conversation. They asked me about my experiences, and they asked me to find out what other students thought should be done to help workers improve their literacy skills. Then I felt like I had an assignment I could get my hands on.

Enrique Ramirez reading to his son.

They used a lot of big words and talked in a language I couldn't understand. I started wondering what I was doing there. So finally I said, "I don't know what you guys are talking about."

Leslie, the Director of Project Read, helped me organize a focus group meeting of students in our program in early January to talk about their difficulties reading and writing at work, and to get their suggestions on what the state and businesses could do to help. We had a great discussion, and I took the results of our meeting back to the committee, but I needed to reach more students. So Leslie and I brainstormed ways to talk to more students, and we decided I should write a letter to all of the students in the ninety-two library literacy programs like ours. (This was in the days before e-mail and online communication!) So I wrote two letters — one to literacy students and one to the library literacy program coordinators. In my letters, I asked the program directors to help get my letter to their students and I asked the students to send letters directly to me about their needs and ideas.

I received more than a hundred letters from all over the state. I read them all and took them to our spring Task Force meeting. You should have seen the faces of my colleagues when I walked in with this box full of letters. They were impressed! Many of the stories that learners told me were powerful, but one of them broke my heart. It was a letter from a woman who worked at a company for a long time. She had a good work history and was a good employee, so she was offered a promotion. But she turned the promotion down because she didn't feel that she could do the reading and writing that was required. When they asked her why she didn't want the promotion, she told them that she had problems with reading and spelling. The next day, when she came to work, she was fired. This really touched me, because I once turned down a promotion because I was afraid. Many of the letters that I received mentioned the fear of being fired from work if students revealed their literacy difficulties.

As the Task Force members talked about this issue, I made this observation. I said, "I know that if a person has a drinking or substance abuse problem and they tell an employer that they voluntarily want to enter a treatment program to get help, the employer can't just fire them, but must make a reasonable effort to work with them. Why isn't it the same for people with literacy needs? Besides, a lot of people who go through treatment programs for substance abuse will become abusers again, but once you teach a person to read, they never become a non-reader again. It's a win-win situation." The group thought this made a lot of sense. Workplace literacy was an employee assistance issue.

So when it got time to wrap up the funding of the Task Force in late 1990, we made a list of recommendations that should be considered for legislation. Three bills were written — one requiring employers to help employees find literacy assistance and to protect employees from being unfairly fired. Don Woodside, an aide to Senator Dills, who sponsored the bill, asked me to help with the wording of the bill and to approve its final writing. The bill was introduced in the legislature in the Spring of 1991. It was amended in the Assembly in June and passed by the Assembly and Senate in mid-July. On August 5, 1991, the Governor signed the bill and it became a law amending the California Labor Code. It is called the Employee Literacy Education Assistance Act. The background text of the law states:

The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

a) A substantial number of California workers are burdened by a problem of illiteracy that limits their productive capacity.

b) Many of these workers are embarrassed to reveal their illiteracy and are hesitant to seek assistance from their employer for fear of losing their jobs.

c) Most California employers are unaware of adult literacy education providers and thus are unable to respond to requests for assistance.

d) By providing assistance, employers would be improving the productivity of the workplace and the economic well-being of the employee.

Continued on next page

Many of the letters that I received mentioned the fear of being fired from work if students revealed their literacy difficulties.

The law states, "An employee who reveals a problem of illiteracy and who satisfactorily performs his or her work shall not be subject to termination of employment because of the disclosure of illiteracy."

When the law passed, I learned first hand that yes, one person can make a difference. I know that I made a difference on that committee. And because of that one woman's willingness to share her tragic story, many other adults throughout California are now protected from the same thing happening to them. Also, by being included in this Task Force, I was more open about my literacy difficulties at work. I got a lot of support from my supervisor for being willing to ask for help on and off the job. The only disappointing thing for me was the lack of publicity about the law. I don't know how many employers or learners in literacy programs know that it is on the books. Even after changing or setting a new policy, you still have to make an effort to let people know about it. In some ways, that is the most challenging part.

~ Enrique Ramirez is a student in Project Read, an adult literacy program just south of San Francisco. He has been a leader in Project Read and the Bay Area for nearly 10 years. He became interested in policy issues when he started participating in National Issues Forum discussions at Project Read. He now leads discussion groups regularly. He helped plan the first Bay Area Adult Learner Conference in 1989 and organized the first Literacy Rally on the steps of the State Capitol that same year.

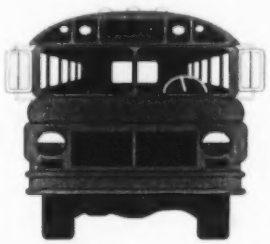
~ Leslie Shelton became the founding director of Project Read in January 1985. She has been very involved in student leadership and learner involvement since that time. She introduced the use of National Issues Forum discussions in her program in 1987 as a way to encourage civic literacy. As a result, many learners in Project Read have become involved in local and statewide issues.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

1. Are there laws in your state that protect low-literacy employees?

For more information on National Issues Forum, call 1-800-228-0810.

Students Fight for Public Transportation



For this article, Silja Kallenbach interviewed Diana North who is a student at The Literacy Project in Orange, Massachusetts.

I understand that you and other students at your learning center have been very involved in trying to get public transportation to your community in Orange, Massachusetts. Could you tell me more about the problem that you have been trying to solve?
There's no public transportation here. We end up walking or taking cabs to the supermarket and other places. It's expensive.

How did you get started?
We just got together as a group and started talking about the issue. We didn't know how to go at it. We wrote letters to different people to ask how we go about getting transportation in the community.

Did they write you back?
Oh yeah, they told us not to give up and to just keep doing what we were doing, which we have been.

Then what did you do?
We put a petition out in the community asking if people wanted public transportation. The students from the center collected signatures. We got a lot of signatures. We learned that we weren't the only ones who wanted bus service in the community. Out in the community, they wanted it too. They do have elderly buses, but not for other people. We also went to a coalition meeting in Athol. We invited the owner of the Athol taxi to come to the meeting, and he said that he would handle it.

Where do things stand right now?
It's in the Athol Cab company's hands. They are trying to get licenses for different towns to run the bus.

How long have you been doing this kind of advocacy?
It's been a couple years.

Has it been hard working together?
Oh no, all the students work real well as a group. We sit down and suggest something, and if somebody doesn't like it, we'll go another route.

What have you learned in the process?
A lot of new things. This is all new to me, like the different roles you have to take. Different ways of going about it. I have become more active in the community. I now go to more of the coalition meetings. I used to be a person who would just sit at home and be with my children. Now I'm involved in everything. I am doing community service for Dexter Park Elementary School. I work in the art room. I love it. I also took a ten week course to become a master teacher to help make the community better. If I didn't go for my GED, I wouldn't be as far as I am today.

Are you hopeful that you'll actually get bus service some day?
Yes, I think it's going to happen. We are not going to give up.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is a problem in your community that needs to change?
2. Make a list of questions about the problem.
3. Who are the people who need to become involved in the solution?
4. What are the first steps that you would take to solve the problem?

Students Speak Out for Adult Education in Vermont

By Sally Ovian

Photo courtesy of The Rutland Herald.

Janet Hurst, Helen Wagner and Joel Mudge.

Janet Hurst, Joel Mudge, and Helen Wagner are making a difference in Vermont. Each of them are taking steps to reach their personal goals, and collectively they are taking giant steps for their community in Rutland, Vermont. They have each learned to think big and are taking on projects which they once thought were beyond their abilities. For instance, last year they and other students met with Representative Jerry Krietzer to help plan the first Vermont Literacy Congress for adult learners.

The Literacy Congress, held in September 1995 at the Vermont State House in Montpelier, was a great success. Student representatives from across Vermont attended workshops on public speaking, time management, leadership, and talking to the media. The skills they learned at the Literacy Congress have helped them recognize their rights and have given them the courage to speak out as advocates for learning. The second Congress is being planned for September 1996.

The Literacy Congress, held in September 1995 at the Vermont State House in Montpelier, was a great success.

The training ground for these three adult learner activists has been the Student Advisory Board of Vermont Adult Learning in Rutland. They have been willing to take time away from being with their families to attend monthly meetings because they want to lend their experience to help plan for future programs.

As members of the Student Advisory Board, Janet, Helen, and Joel have testified before Vermont Legislators on behalf of the state's literacy programs and have done other kinds of public speaking. Helen explains, "I used to be quiet. I used to be shy. Now they call me motor-mouth." The three of them were featured recently in a local newspaper article. At present, Janet serves as the chairperson of the Advisory Board. She speaks emphatically about the importance of working together: "If we are to move forward we must work together."

This spring, these three adults are taking leadership in planning for the participation of the learning center in the Rutland Loyalty Day Parade which commemorates all those who have died for our country. Joel has been busy canvassing his neighborhood to collect returnable bottles to raise funds for a banner for the Parade. Bea Lewis, the secretary and treasurer of the Student Advisory Board, has offered to sew the banner with her friends. Other students have also volunteered their time and services to help with the planning. They all hope that more students will join them to stand up for adult basic education in the parade. Helen, a graduate of the program, says, "The time has come for me to pay Vermont Adult Learning back."

By becoming involved in their community on behalf of adult basic education, Janet, Joel, and Helen have gained self-confidence and developed new skills. They are well versed in public speaking and public relations. They now know how to run meetings, plan projects, and talk to politicians and other decision-makers. They advocate for adult basic education with a passion that comes from personal experience. As Janet states, "Life is tougher than school — get all the education you can! Your efforts will be rewarded."

~ Sally Ovian is a teacher and the volunteer coordinator at Vermont Adult Learning in Rutland, VT.

Community-Building in an ESL Classroom

By Jackie Maldonado

This year brought a lot of surprises to my ESL classes at the Charter Oaks Terrace Public Housing Project. They began with what seemed to be two ordinary groups of people and ended with people from both groups getting jobs and pushing themselves to get advanced education. This program was about self triumphs more than just about breaking a language barrier.

The support and bond that was built in both groups surpassed anything that I could have expected for these classes. Although I had only ten students, I felt like I had a community in my hands. Not only did they learn a language, they also learned about being a community whether they knew it or not!

The students didn't know each other before they came to the class, and some of them were very uneasy. I helped to build the sense of community in the class by sharing my own struggles with them. This included the struggles I had learning English when I was a teenager. I told them how I felt bad when I mispronounced words, and how the other kids would laugh at me. It seemed that I would never learn the language, but I did. This helped them to open up and talk about their own experiences. We really identified with each other.

In the process of tutoring, I learned a lot about how very important it is to have moral support, to be able to share your everyday struggles with other people who are going through the same things, and to talk about solutions.

We talked a lot about their goals and about their family situations. They want to be independent, they want to communicate, and they want jobs. Their goal is also to be able to say what they want to say at the doctor's office and the social service office, and to help their children. We talked about the problems with drugs and garbage at Charter Oaks

Continued on next page

and the plans that are underway to move residents out and to rebuild the housing project over the next few years. It is a very unsettling time for the residents.

I think these talks opened everybody up, got them comfortable talking about what was going on in their lives, and took away some of the isolation. It also helped them realize how they really need to learn English.

Some of them did really well. One got into a nurses assistant training program, another left my class and got her GED and is now planning to go to the community college. Another student went to the community college to look into advanced ESL classes and ended up taking accounting.

Having these classes gave me a lot of hope in knowing that there is a chance for people to get together and rebuild that community feeling. The community of learners that was created was wonderful. I am now definitely convinced that this program works in a unique way. This program is not only about learning English, but it's also about empowerment, support, and teaching each other, both teachers and students. I'm so proud and happy that I was a part of this program.

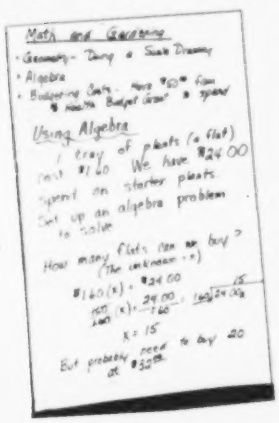
~ Jackie Maldonado has been a welfare recipient, but for the last two years has taught ESL to small groups of adults at the Charter Oaks Terrace Public Housing Project for Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford. As an active leader of the neighborhood group HART (Hartford Areas Rally Together), she helped found HART's Job Center. She strongly believes in the power of people working together.

Community Garden

By Edina White

Dirt is dirt. Manure is manure. Bugs are bugs. I didn't like any of these things when we first started the community garden.

Then I had a change of heart and found myself enjoying the smell and feel of the earth. Excitement was there within me as I watched the growth of the garden. Planting, weeding, and harvesting was hard work but it was rewarding.



People at the North Quabbin Adult Education Center started this project in May, 1995 when a class started using "planning a garden" as part of a math project. Some people said that they were more interested in trying to have a real garden. This led to getting a plot in the Millers River Community Garden in Orange, Massachusetts where about thirty people plant gardens each year.

First we mapped out a plan with chalk in an area at the Center and talked about what to plant. As a math project, we set up a budget for the garden and decided what to plant in our 20' X 40' plot. A small group of women visited a greenhouse and farm to find out the prices of plants. In late May, a group bought plants and seeds from Maple Valley Farm and started planting in the plot.

Radishes, green beans, summer squash, zucchini, butternut squash, cabbage, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cucumbers, and tomatoes were planted. About a half dozen people continued to share in the work of the garden to help weed and check on the plants during the summer. People listed the time they worked in the garden on a chart so anyone who helped could harvest the vegetables they wanted. We shared the harvest with many people at the Center and even took extra vegetables to the Orange Food Pantry in September.

I now have a new respect for the farmers. They work hard and put in long hours so we can go to the grocery store and buy what we need without any hard labor.

~ Edina White is a student at North Quabbin Adult Education Center, MA.

What Support Do Students Need in Order to Make a Difference?

By Michele Verni

Sometimes an individual student, or a group of students, takes the initiative to do something out of the ordinary. But imagine if programs regularly provided opportunities for students to get involved in activities beyond the classroom, and utilized resources for students to design, organize and lead projects. This kind of leadership development is the goal of SABES (System for Adult Basic Education Support) Student Leadership Mini-Grants.

For the past three years, the SABES Central Resource Center has awarded student leadership mini-grants to local programs in Massachusetts. This is a statewide effort to promote student involvement in adult basic education programs in and beyond the classroom or tutoring sessions.

The underlying mission of these student leadership mini-grants is to give students opportunities to develop and exhibit their leadership abilities. Students have developed these abilities in many different ways. For example, they have become peer tutors, facilitators of a support group, representatives for their class, organizers of a conference, editors and writers of local newsletters, computer assistants, designers of a student policy handbook, and advisory board members of their local programs.

Some of these projects have had a lasting impact on either the program or the individual student. For instance, a staff from one of the projects said, "Our program has become more learner-centered and more sensitive to students' needs." Their students developed a student policy handbook, started a student-led support group, and began giving orientations to all new students. The changes that this project engendered have continued even after the grant ended.

Other projects focused on students and computers. For example, one project trained a group of students to use the Internet, and then those students trained other students. Many projects used this model of training students as trainers. It was a very successful model that enhanced the continuation of the project when the grant was over. Another kind of project enabled students from a GED class to plan, organize and run a community Domestic Violence Conference.

Over the years, a total of twenty-seven projects have been funded through a competitive grant process. The small grants of approximately $800 are awarded for six-month projects that aim at having a long-term impact. We left it open for programs to design projects that were meaningful to them, although we did provide some general guidelines. For the last two years, we have required projects to write a "how-to" guide about their project. SABES has copies of these "how-to" guides to distribute to other students who may be interested in doing something similar in their program.

After reflecting upon these mini-grant projects, we have learned a variety of lessons. First, students want to get involved, especially if they are given the opportunity, responsibility, and are compensated for their time and expertise. Second, for these projects to be truly successful, students and staff need to work together. There needs to be some guidance about how to deal with the "new" roles that are placed on the students and the staff from these leadership opportunities because sometimes it is difficult for staff to "let go" of their control. It is clear that students can make a difference at both the individual and program level if given the chance.

~ Michele Verni is Student Leadership and Hotline Coordinator for SABES/World Education.

For more information or copies of the SABES Student Leadership Mini-Grants, contact Michele Verni at (617) 482-9485 x529.

Taking Action Against Violence

By the Students in the Intermediate Class at Dorcas Place Parent Literacy Center and their teacher, Rebecca Garland

This March a 13-year-old girl who attended middle school in Providence was attacked by two other girls, 13 and 17 years old. While people stood by, they pinned her down and slashed her face with a razor blade. They cut an artery and she almost died from blood loss. She received over 300 stitches and staples.

Our adult Intermediate Class, at Dorcas Place Parent Literacy Center, read about this incident and was really upset about it. We agreed that we had to stand up against violence, make a decision to take some action and work together to help the girl. First, we called all around to get the girl's address. This was difficult because the girl was a minor. But finally, the middle school responded and gave us the information we needed. We wrote cards and letters to the family to express our own individual feelings. Many of us have children her age, and we could imagine how devastating it was to them. We received a lovely card in response and a photo of the girl. Then the mother of the girl called us and we began to have a relationship with the family.

During one conversation, we asked if there was anything we could do for the family. They told us that they needed a bed so the girl would have her own bed while she was recovering. We decided to buy sheets, blankets, pillowcases and a bedspread to go with the bed. We needed to raise money to get these things, so we decided to have a food fundraiser. What a job that was!

We liked working together on the project because we all participated and talked things out until we agreed.

We argued about the prices we were going to charge for the food, but we finally came to some agreement. We had over thirty different kinds of food. We had Chinese, Spanish, American and Soul food. We called a local food store and got a $25 donation which was very helpful. We put donation boxes in stores and banks. We shopped together and slaved over hot grease in the Dorcas Place kitchen.

We invited the family of the little girl, and they came and ate with us. We advertised all over the school and invited people from the outside, including friends and family. We also invited a local television station, and we were on the evening news. We raised enough money to buy a double bed and bed linen. We delivered these things to the family and they were very happy.

In our class, we wrote about what we learned from doing this project. We have some advice for other adult classes that decide to do something like this. Here are our thoughts:

Make sure you have fun.
We had a lot of happy times doing this project. We felt good when we brought the bedding to the little girl's family. She showed us her bedroom and she smiled a lot. Seeing her happy after all she had been through made us happy. Having the food sale was a lot of fun too. We liked working together on the project because we all participated and talked things out until we agreed.

Be prepared for frustration.
There were many times when we felt frustrated during the project. We felt there were some problems pertaining to the family which led us to believe that they didn't need the money to buy a bed. But we discussed them and decided that it wasn't the little girl's fault, so we just went on and did what we had planned to do. We also got frustrated when we argued about the prices to charge for the food sale. It was hard to agree. Another frustrating time was when we were going to deliver the bed to the family. You see, not everyone from the class was there that day, and some people were upset and felt left out. We had a big discussion and decided that we would do things together from now on.

Remember your goal when you want to quit.
We kept thinking about the young girl and her family and how terrible the violence was. We always remembered we were doing a little thing to fight violence and that every little thing helps. If everybody pitched in, we might not have the problem of violence anymore. We decided to take action because we felt strongly about what happened. It was sad to hear about it. We knew that things can happen to anybody, but we felt that we had to make a stand for the children. It upset us that people can be so rotten and mean to others. When things got hard, we thought about these things.

Remember that you can make a difference.
We made a difference in that family's life. The family was happy when they saw that people were helping them and trying to support them. It can help when others see that people care, and maybe it will change them or change their life.

We hope other classes will take action and make a difference in their communities. Give it a try. You will learn a lot about taking action and working together as a team.

Controlling Our Economic Destiny: An Update on The Mountain Women Soap Company

By Alex Levin

I am writing to give an update on the Mountain Women Soap Company which I wrote about in the last issue of *The Change Agent.* The soap company started as a project out of the Carroll County JOBS program as a way to develop meaningful employment for single mothers. Since the article, the company has undergone quite a metamorphosis. A $10,000 economic development grant from The Northern New Hampshire Charitable Foundation enabled the company to develop packaging and go into full-time production.

The company gained acceptance into two juried wholesale shows: one in Portland, Maine, the other in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Everyone at both shows remarked positively on the quality of the product and the uniqueness of the packaging and many orders were placed. The soap was chosen to be photographed for next year's Valley Forge Catalog.

The company is now becoming involved with doing retail craft shows and is signed on for fifteen shows all across New England over the summer and through the Christmas season.

Look for Paula, Ginny, Norma, and Linda, the proud workers who have just begun to discover how creative, talented and capable they are. Despite everyone telling them it couldn't be done, they have gone ahead and accomplished something they will proudly remember for the rest of their lives. Now no goal is impossible. With a little bit more luck and a lot more sweat, the women hope that by Christmas the company will be self-sustaining. It's their way of "changing welfare as we know it."

~ Alex Levin is the director of the Carroll County JOBS program in Conway, NH.

oter Power!

By Carin Schiewe

VoterPower! is a new, non-partisan statewide initiative whose goal is to promote democracy in Massachusetts by dramatically increasing voter participation. This effort seeks to strengthen the capacity of locally-based organizations such as non-profit agencies, education programs, neighborhood centers, labor unions, and small businesses to conduct and sustain effective voter participation efforts under the "Motor Voter" Law. VoterPower's goal is to not only register new voters, but to incorporate citizen participation and voter education into ongoing local organizing and education efforts.

What is the Motor Voter Law? In 1993, Congress passed the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) which mandates voter registration when people get drivers' licenses and when applying for benefits such as AFDC Food Stamps, WIC, Medicaid, and disability services. It also allows for mail-in postcard registration.

The beginning of VoterPower! coincided with the passage of the federal National Voter Registration Act, which offers unprecedented opportunities. Unlike in the past, any of us can now conduct voter registration drives door-to-door, on the shop floor, at local events, through schools, agencies, churches, businesses, at supermarkets, and public transit stations. Using voter registration drives as a vehicle, we can talk about democracy issues in a more relevant way, linking them to individual, local, and neighborhood concerns.

Taking advantage of the new law to register and educate voters is not a new idea. Many extraordinary and significant efforts have been and are underway across New England, including the VERA Campaign by the New England Literacy Resource Center. Leaders who have been in the trenches for over twenty years, registering and educating new voters, are applying their formidable skills and experience to the work in this new context. Organizations are gathering and analyzing election statistics, targeting wards and precincts, designing training programs, voter manuals, and tracking systems. Neighborhood activists and church leaders are making the connection between issues that really matter to people and voting.

Following is a list of which New England states are implementing the National Voter Registration Act:

State	*Yes*	*No*
Connecticut	✔	
Maine	✔	
Massachusetts	✔	
New Hampshire		✔
Rhode Island	✔	
Vermont		✔

For more information on the implementation status in each state, contact the state's Secretary General's Office.

~ Carin Schiewe is the Executive Director of the Commonwealth Coalition in Massachusetts which sponsors VoterPower!

The Long Struggle for Women to Get the Right to Vote

By Silja Kallenbach

If you are a woman, eligible to vote but not voting, consider what it took for you to get the right to vote. It was no easy task. Women, who were called suffragettes, fought for 72 years to get the right to vote. They used a variety of strategies to advocate for their cause. They toured the country giving speeches and handing out flyers in twenty-six languages. They held rallies and picketed the White House. Some women, like Alice Paul, went on hunger strikes. Finally, they formed their own party — the Women's Party. All this took place at a time when women did not have the right to own property, and men had the legal right to beat their wives.

Women like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anna Howard Shaw, and Alice Paul were in it for the long haul. They did not give up inspite of fierce opposition which included most clergy and liquor companies. The liquor companies were especially ruthless. They were afraid that women, if given the right to vote, would vote for prohibition. They gave free booze to men on the voting day in many states, in exchange for their NO vote on women's suffrage.

The two women who started the campaign, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, did not live to see the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution which finally gave women the right to vote in 1920. But their legacy lives on. All of us can learn from the insights and experiences of these courageous women who fought long and tirelessly for the right to vote. Consider these words of wisdom by Susan B. Anthony, "Cautious, careful people always casting about to preserve their reputation can never bring about reform. Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation."

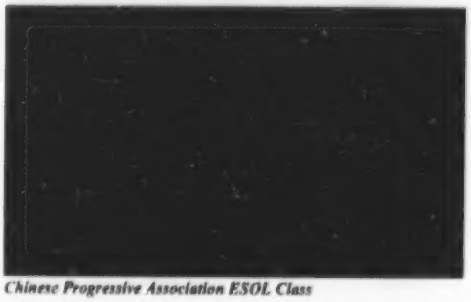
The video, Votes for Women, captures the historical highlights of women's struggle to get the right to vote. This 20 minute video, packed with facts, quotes, photos, and original footage is well worth viewing. NELRC has one copy of this videotape. Adult educators in New England can borrow it for use with their students for two weeks against a $35.00 deposit which will be returned upon receipt of the videotape. Call Marie Horchler at 617-482-9485 for more information.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING ASSIGNMENT

1. Does anything about the history of women's struggle to get the right to vote surprise you?
2. Why do you think there was so much opposition to women's right to vote?
3. Do you think more women would vote if they knew what it took for women to get the right to vote? Why/why not?
4. What does it mean when somebody's "legacy lives on"?
5. What other groups of people have had to struggle to get the right to vote? What do you know about their struggles?
6. What else would you like to find out?
7. Read and think about the quote by Susan B. Anthony. Explain in your own words what she means. Write your reaction to it. Do you agree with her? Is it sometimes necessary to not care what others think about you? What drawbacks do you see in this attitude? Explain your reasons and give examples.

Voter Education in the Asian Community

Silja Kallenbach, NELRC Coordinator, interviewed Puay Ser Chan, Education Coordinator of the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) for this article. CPA is a community organization that strives to empower the Asian community of Boston and beyond. CPA's activities include three levels of ESOL classes, and citizenship classes supplemented by individual tutoring.



Chinese Progressive Association ESOL Class

I understand that voter education and registration are an important part of CPA's work. Why is that?

The Asian people are so under-represented in the political setting, so we really want to push for our concerns. Our voices are seldom represented or heard. CPA wants to let immigrants see that we can claim our own power. Asian immigrants, especially from China, feel they don't want to get involved. They fear they'll get hurt. When we finally get them involved politically, we hold a rally or something and they see themselves in the newspaper and get really excited. They ask, did we win? While we don't always win, we do celebrate when we have even small victories. We have to keep our spirits up.

Could you tell me what kinds of voter education and registration activities you have done?

CPA encourages every student to become a U.S. citizen and to know their rights. Building students' political consciousness is very important to us. We have speakers come in. We also have our own videotapes on how to become a citizen and how to fight for Asians' rights. We work with the Asian-American Civic Association and the Quincy School Community Council here in Chinatown to do joint voter registration. We target festivals, fairs, and other community activities. We were trained by the Massachusetts Immigrant Resource Center (MIRA) and funded by the Office of New Americans of Massachusetts.

Almost every Sunday we have volunteers come in to do follow-up with students. They ask if students have become citizens and if they have registered to vote. They also offer more information if the student needs it. We send voter registration forms to every student who becomes a U.S. citizen.

How have you, as an ESOL teacher, integrated these activities with your instruction?

We talk about issues in class. I bring in newspaper articles and cartoons. Cartoons are good because they speak without too much language. Sometimes we have field trips. For example, we took students to the celebration at City Hall when the minimum wage was increased. I talk to them about the concept of majority rule and how you can try to influence the majority. For instance, if we are going to eat out and we have to decide between pizza and Chinese food, and if the majority want pizza, then those who wanted Chinese food either have to live with it or go without eating.

The way I see it, ESOL is not just to learn English, it's to encourage students to think. My students, especially women, don't want to question too much. I don't want my students to just spit out words like "freedom." I want them to get a real sense of what it means. Once they analyze this concept, they're more ready to participate in the community and the political process. I think the personal is very political.

It sounds like you are really challenging your students to think and become politically active. How have your students reacted to this kind of ESOL education?

At first, they were not very comfortable. We had to almost slip it in. But now we are finding the students that come in say they want to vote. They are angry because they work so hard and pay taxes, and yet there are no resources for them. As immigrants, they are always being scapegoated for job loss, violence, and welfare. They are beginning to realize that they need to vote and be politically active to defend themselves. The issues are more personal somehow. Fear is a big part of it. They are afraid that if they are not U.S. citizens, things will be taken away from them. They are also realizing that this is their country whether they like it or not.

How do you deal with students who object to these lessons?

You cannot push people to become political. It happens when they are ready. We show them that there are things they can do individually and also as a group to have a decent life. You need to find out the students' needs so you can communicate with them better. Students need to know how special it is to be in the U.S. and what it means.

For information about CPA's voter education video and Knowing Our Right To Vote manual for ESOL students, call 617-357-4499.

Unveiling the Mysteries of Voting

By Nazneen Rahman

I enjoyed discussing political issues and candidates with my friends, but I never actually voted during an election. Even though I am a teacher, I had been afraid of the voting machine. Why? Because I didn't know how to use it. In fact, as an immigrant, I didn't know the voting process at all. I felt that my citizenship students must feel the same way, and I decided to embark upon this task of learning together with my students.

I called the Board of Elections and arranged for a demonstration of the voting machine for my students. I also invited the Secretary of State to speak to us about the importance of voting. I gathered information about the candidates and the elected positions we vote for. I learned that I could call up candidates to find out how they felt about issues before I voted. I shared all of this information with my class.

I have been voting ever since. Because of my voting experience, I have become more aware and involved in the political process. I go to the school committee and city council meetings to learn more about the issues and the candidates and, therefore, participate as an informed voter. I have also become involved in my child's school and in the public school system. I am a member of the district task force on school improvement. I attend meetings, write letters to school officials, and talk to school committee members about issues that the school system is currently facing such as desegregation. I am also actively involved in a neighborhood church and a neighborhood crime watch.

These activities give me a sense of belonging and add meaning to my life. I have learned that, as a woman, I can access information, gain knowledge, and have the power to control what happens to me, my family, and my community. Before coming to the United States, I had never been involved in the political process or even voted. This empowerment has been a discovery of self-worth and of happiness in knowing my voice is important.

~ Nazneen Rahman is an ESL teacher and the Citizenship/ESL Coordinator at the International Institute of Rhode Island.

WHAT IF ROSA PARKS SHOT THE BUS DRIVER?

A Lesson About Rosa Parks and the Choices We All Make

By Rebecca Garland

This is a lesson based on the play about Rosa Parks taken from Take a Walk in Their Shoes. This can be ordered from Puffin Publishers at 212-366-2000. Photographs of the South during the Jim Crow days were selected from America Revisited. This photo history is published by Norman Ross Publishing, 1-800-648-8850.

Pre-Reading Activities

Show photographs to illustrate the segregation that black people in the South experienced during the Jim Crow era. Explain the laws surrounding the buses (i.e. it was illegal for a black person to sit in the same row of four seats on a bus as a white person. So if four black people were sitting in a row, they would all have to get up if one white person wanted to sit down in the same row). Ask them who they thought would ride the bus more: blacks or whites. Why? Ask them whose money the bus company needed more: blacks' or whites'. Why?

The Play

Read the play out loud with each student taking a part. Discuss the following questions:

- *What was the problem?*
- *What was the cause of the problem?*
- *How did Rosa try to solve the problem?*
- *What kind of attitude did Rosa have?*
- *What did Rosa's action start? How did she make a difference?*

Students act out the play with different endings. Split the class into three groups. Give each group a card with one of the following instructions on it:

1. Do a role play about the story you just read. Show Rosa refusing to give up her seat on the bus.
2. Do a role play about the story you just read but change the way Rosa acted. In your version, Rosa tells herself it won't make any difference anyway. She tells herself she doesn't want to get involved, so she moves to let the white person sit down.
3. Do a role play about the story you just read but change the way Rosa acted. In your version, Rosa gets really angry, takes out a gun and shoots the bus driver.

After each role play, ask the participants:

- *How did you feel in your role?*
- *What do you think would have happened if what you just acted out had really happened?*
- *Rosa had choices. She could have acted differently than she did. Do you think she made the right choice?*
- *How did Rosa's behavior in the scenario affect the future of blacks in this country? What effect did she have on history? Was it worth all the hard work?*
- *Can you make a difference?*

Teacher's Reflections

This was a powerful lesson. As the students acted out the scenes, I could see them wrestling with all kinds of emotions. They had a lot of fun doing the role plays, but it was also an uncomfortable exercise since it dealt with an uncomfortable subject. Rosa Parks became more real to them through their role plays than she ever would have from simply reading the story and answering questions. I think they began to realize that Rosa had choices to make when she was sitting on that bus. This doesn't come through when you simply read it as history. I watched them struggle with abstract questions like, "What if Rosa had just done what she was told?" or "What if Rosa had acted violently?"

~ Rebecca Garland is an ABE teacher at Dorcas Place in Providence, RI.

A Key to Combining Voter Education and Academics

By Dana Trattner

In teaching upper level literacy, I have found that lofty discussions about the responsibilities of citizens to vote bring resistance when introduced in isolation. Students who are focused on their immediate educational goals need to feel that all class activities are relevant to their goals.

In my Reading Four class, I use voter education materials as a means for my students to demonstrate their understanding of the skills taught. For example, I reinforce scanning for main ideas and supporting details using voter related materials. My criteria for choosing these materials is that they are directly related to students' concerns and issues. News articles on current proposed bills can serve this purpose. As students practice these skills, they are informed about the bills that affect their lives.

By brainstorming and freewriting, students develop an opinion on a bill and write a thesis statement on whether the bill should become a law. Students learn to research facts that support and strengthen their stand. After teaching persuasive essay and letter writing skills, I have students draft a letter to the editor, their representative or senator. When students see their letter in the newspaper or get a personal official response in the mail, they receive a powerful validation of their efforts.

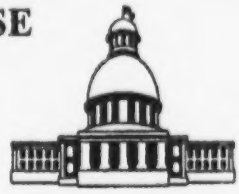
To expose students to candidates, I teach comparative and expository writing and use a variety of articles. After scanning for the main ideas in the proposals of candidates, students summarize their findings on the board. Together, the class notes similarities and differences. Based on this, students choose an issue on which at least two candidates hold different views. After being taught to research the issues and do comparative/expository writing, students write about the candidates they have chosen. These papers are then published and shared with the class, further reinforcing the exposure to voter issues.

Teaching how to interpret information on graphs and charts presents another opportunity to utilize voter related materials. Rather than using graphs from science or psychology texts, graphs on voter turnout, standard of living trends, or how certain government policy affects our everyday lives can be used.

In presenting voter education in this skill-oriented manner, I have increased my students' awareness of voter issues without being didactic; therein lies the key.

~ Dana Trattner is a teacher at Portland Adult Education, Maine.

AN ABE CLASS MOVES INTO THE RHODE ISLAND STATE HOUSE



By Jonathan Leaning

For Rebecca Garland's ABE students, the long waiting lists for Section 8 housing turned out to be the spark that ignited their interest in political involvement. Rebecca responded to this concern by inviting guest speakers to the class. She found that legislators, public officials, spokespeople from community groups, and even congressional candidates were all generally very willing to come speak at the school. As the students investigated the issue further — through readings, research, discussions, and writings — their knowledge of the subject deepened, along with their interest.

Rebecca made a point of constantly showing the relevance of the theme-based approach, and its direct links to the acquisition of the ABE skills and knowledge — reading, writing, social studies, and civics. Often, she found that it was important to regularly take a pulse of the situation and ask, "How are people feeling about this? Do you feel you are learning? Is this worthwhile?"

Often, she found that it was important to regularly take a pulse of the situation and ask "How are people feeling about this? Do you feel you are learning? Is this worthwhile?"

The school, Dorcas Place, managed to get permission from the Rhode Island State House to let the students do a mock legislative debate in the legislative chamber. In addition, the Lieutenant Governor agreed to preside as moderator of the debate. In spite of the intimidating prospect of "taking over" the State House, the students were also intrigued by the aura that surrounds a place like a State Capitol. Though many had previously harbored the attitude of "I don't belong in a place like that," this project presented them with a unique chance to go and find out what it was like.

On the day they arrived at the State House, Rebecca remembers the feelings of excitement mixed with apprehension. It was an event they had long prepared for. However, when the moment came for the debate to actually begin, "there was absolute silence." Nobody dared to be the first to speak. Rebecca recalls that tense moment vividly. "I remember thinking to myself: this whole thing is going to bomb."

After an unbearably long moment of silence, Rebecca finally stood up and encouraged students to offer the responses and questions they had all prepared. That opened the floodgate. Somebody responded with a shy question, then another came, followed by even more questions. As one of the students describes, "I was scared at first . . . but after a while, the fear went away. We got over it and we were able to say what we felt." Despite a halting start, the debate that they had hoped for finally happened.

Rebecca reflects that the process of preparing for and doing the debate seemed to bring about changes in the students' self-image. One result was that "students took more ownership of the class." She and the school have repeated the State House visits for subsequent classes, and each time she has noticed the same process of increasing self-esteem. How each student absorbs the experience and what actions arise from the project inevitably has been unique to that person. One group of students from the class described here went on to testify on their own initiative at a real hearing on a housing bill at the State House. "It is about taking control of one's life," says Rebecca.

~ Excerpted with permission from a draft copy of Incorporating Citizen Participation Into Adult Education Curricula by Jonathan Leaning. Rebecca Garland is an ABE teacher at Dorcas Place in Providence, RI.

QUIZ: How Does Your Political Knowledge Compare With That of Other Americans?

The Washington Post, along with the Kaiser Foundation and Harvard University, conducted a national survey based on telephone interviews with 1,514 randomly selected adults to see how many could answer the following questions. How many of these questions can you answer?
(Answers and the results of the survey are on the right)

1. Can you name who was president when the Watergate scandal took place?
2. As far as you know, is there a limit on the number of terms in office a president of the United States can serve, or not?
3. Can you name which party - the Democrats or the Republicans - has the most members in the U.S. Senate?
4. Can you name which party - the Democrats or the Republicans - has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives?
5. Can you name the current vice president of the United States?
6. As far as you know, who has the final responsibility to decide if a law is constitutional or not?
7. Can you name the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?
8. Which party do you think is more conservative - the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?
9. How many years is a single term in office for a U.S. Senator?
10. Can you name the current chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court?

Answers:

1. Richard M. Nixon
(88% Answered Correctly)

2. Yes (2 terms of 4 years)
(81% Answered Correctly)

3. Republicans
(62% Answered Correctly)

4. Republicans
(61% Answered Correctly)

5. Al Gore
(60% Answered Correctly)

6. Supreme Court
(54% Answered Correctly)

7. Rep. Newt Gingrich
(53% Answered Correctly)

8. Republican Party
(52%Answered Correctly)

9. Six
(26% Answered Correctly)

10. William H. Rehnquist
(8% Answered Correctly)

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Immigrant Students Advocate for Adult Education

By Jonathan Leaning

The timing was right. In the Fall of 1995, the elections were quickly approaching, and the upcoming local race provided a good opportunity for Bob Jeltsch's citizenship class to look at elections, voting, and voter registration. Since knowledge of these issues was also core to the naturalization test that students were preparing for, it was easy to insert a voting activity into the curriculum. It was also a good chance to take a meaningful look into voting while encouraging students to register.

After having the class read over voter registration forms and related class materials, Bob started off a discussion with questions such as, "Who votes, who doesn't vote, and why?" The subject inspired reflections on the meaning of elections and democracy, particularly since the students inevitably made comparisons to the political systems in their own countries. One Nigerian student talked of his experience with military rule, and how the lack of freedom of speech had shaped his perceptions of the risks of discussing politics in public. Talking about the different forms of democracy and government operating in each country brought the subject alive for the class. By contrasting the various systems, Bob was able to illustrate what voting could mean in the United States. This provided a convenient lead-in to the upcoming local elections and related issues.

Following the discussion, Bob suggested that students go out to talk to other classes about voting and how to register. This would provide them with an opportunity to practice their speaking skills while further exploring the issue. Initially, they were hesitant about doing this, but as they started into the project, their nervousness seemed to diminish. Once they began doing their presentations in the other classes, they found that there was a wide range of perspectives. The common questions such as, "Why vote if there's no one good to vote for?" and "What is the point?," were raised in the discussions, challenging both their speaking abilities and their grasp of the issue. They were surprised to discover the number of students who as yet hadn't registered to vote. When they reached the end of their presentations, they handed out registration forms to everyone in the class. Once finished with the project, many of the students expressed satisfaction to Bob at having "done something."

Meanwhile, Bob heard that major changes in the distribution of adult education funding were being considered at the state level. The changes proposed would dramatically affect the students' access to adult education classes at the center and elsewhere.

Bob suggested that as part of their writing activities, they write a letter to the appropriate public official to let them know their thoughts on the matter. As they talked about how to write the letter, Bob used the opportunity to explore the concept of the three branches of government, elaborating on the role of the branch to which the letter was being directed. This helped the students to identify what they wanted to say and to focus their ideas. Without correcting any of the text, Bob typed up the class' letter and brought it back for the next session. The class studied the letter, made the necessary corrections, then mailed it off. They did not receive any reply from that official to the letter, but when students composed and sent off their own letters to their respective state representatives, they did receive reply letters.

The students were surprised when a state representative agreed to come and meet with them at the school. The legislator's visit proved to be more than he had bargained for. Once the discussion opened up, questions came one after the other. Towards the end of the event, one student, a Cambodian woman, stood up and delivered a fiery speech on why funding shouldn't be cut. She concluded the speech with an impassioned "Please don't cut our school!," at which point all the students spontaneously stood up and applauded.

After a few weeks, news suddenly arrived that not only had the cuts been warded off, but the legislature decided to increase state funding by $4 million. "When I announced the news in class, a cheer broke out!," says Bob. Though the students knew that their class was but one piece of the statewide movement, "they felt they had accomplished something important." The added funding meant that the very classes they were taking could continue to be available to people like themselves. It was a concrete achievement in which they had played an important part.

Excerpted with permission from the draft copy of Incorporating Citizen Participation Into Adult Education Curricula by Jonathan Leaning. Bob Jeltsch is an ESOL teacher at Harborside Community Center, Boston, MA.

"Incorporating Citizen Participation Into Adult Education Curricula" will soon be available in print. To obtain a draft copy, please send a $5.00 check made out to NELRC/World Education, with your name, organization, mailing address and phone number. Checks can be mailed to Marie Horchler, NELRC/World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210.

Education Gives Us Wings

By the Groveton JOBS Class

We are a class of eight students in the small town of Groveton, north of the White Mountains in northern New Hampshire. We come from many walks in life, but we all share the common goal of obtaining our GED. One step in furthering our education!

We have all been called "drop-outs," and we all know what it is to struggle. These things have made us stronger. Most of us were afraid when we came to this class — afraid we were not able to do the work, afraid we would not be accepted as we were, afraid of just being afraid. Over time, we have all gained self-esteem. We have learned not to be afraid. We have each learned that our capacity for learning is endless. We now know that through education we can learn to soar like eagles — to set and obtain our goals in life.

With all the talk about cutting budgets for adult education at both state and federal levels, we have become very concerned because we feel that no one can get ahead in life without an education. In the fall of 1995, Congress agreed to provide $250 million to fund adult basic education programs. It appeared, with budget cuts, as if this funding might be s[illegible]hed.

We learned in class how our local, state and federal governments operate. Prior to understanding this, none of us felt we could make a difference. We used to say, "Only the bigwigs in Congress and the White House could do that." We agreed we could make a collective effort and try to make a difference in the minds of our public officials. In February 1996, we decided to write letters to our New Hampshire legislators asking them to support adult basic education. We wrote letters to New Hampshire Congressmen. We made copies of each letter and sent them to President William Clinton, Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. We addressed, stamped, and mailed eighty-eight letters altogether. We had a wonderful feeling as we walked to the post office to mail our letters.

We have received letters in return from these public officials acknowledging our concerns. This alone makes us feel we are real entities in these United States of America. We have decided we do count, and perhaps we can make a difference after all. Hopefully, funding for adult basic education will continue. We believe education can truly give us wings to soar like eagles to better and unknown places in life.

~ Claire Correia, Shelly DuPont, Jodi Gadwah, Hope Goodrum, Betty Marsh, Wendy Osgood, Richard Sweatt, and Amanda Wright are students, and Tina Ferguson is their teacher at the JOBS Program in Groveton, NH.

The Economy

THE ECONOMY IS DOING WELL, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE AVERAGE WORKER?

The Rising Tide is no Longer Lifting All Boats, Only Yachts

By Silja Kallenbach

Real wages are falling, so a paycheck buys less than it used to. Steady jobs with a future are disappearing in an avalanche of layoffs. The average worker spends a hundred hours more per year on the job than twenty years ago. The problem isn't the economy which keeps on growing. Stock prices set new records every month, but the rising tide is no longer lifting all boats, only the yachts.

Top executives have salary deals that beat winning the lottery. The going hourly rate for Chief Executive Officers (CEO) is now $2,100 an hour, or 183 times the average worker's hourly wage in 1995. Some CEOs like AT&T's Robert Allen earned more than $2,100 an hour. He celebrated his good fortune on the second day of 1996 by announcing plans to downsize 40,000 AT&T employees.

Some economists say that high CEO salaries help keep the country competitive in the global economy. However, Japanese corporations compete just fine in the global economy, and the wage gap between their executives and workers is eight times smaller than in the United States.

$200,000, is the salary of the President of the United States. If we can run the nation on $200,000 a year, why not a corporation?

The National Alliance of Business writes that "the most important dimension of growing income inequality is the increasing returns to education and skills." By this logic, if workers only got enough education and the right kinds of skills, the wage gap would not be so bad. They cite statistics from the U.S. Census that show a median income of $18,573 for people with less than ninth grade education, and $64,941 for people with bachelor's degree or more. While no one can argue against the economic benefits of more education and skills, we can ask whether education alone is the solution to the enormous wage disparities in the United States.

Labor Secretary Robert Reich's solution to the growing wage gap is to give corporations tax breaks if they provide training and decent benefits for workers and share profits with them. He calls this good corporate citizenship.

People at the Share The Wealth organization question whether Secretary Reich's solution goes far enough. Based on the fact that corporations are budgeted to receive $4 trillion worth of tax breaks over the next seven years, they propose a Ten Times Rule: No taxpayer-supported subsidies for corporations that pay their CEOs more than ten times the pay of their lowest paid worker. Why ten times? No worker today can decently support a family on less than $20,000. Ten times $20,000 is $200,000, the salary of the President of the United States. If we can run the nation on $200,000 a year, why not a corporation?

Sources:
Too Much, published by Share the Wealth, Spring 1996
Workforce Economics, published by National Alliance of Business, April 1996

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does the author mean by "The Rising tide is no longer lifting all boats, only the yachts?"
2. Calculate the average worker's hourly wage based on the information in the article. Come up with examples of jobs that probably pay an hourly wage in that range. Do these jobs have anything in common?
3. The article suggests that there is a relationship between AT&T CEO, Robert Allen's salary increase and AT&T layoffs this year. Do you think this is a fair assumption? Explain your reasons.
4. The National Alliance of Business suggests that education is the key to equalizing wages. What do you think?
5. What kinds of things can you imagine determine people's salary levels? Is there a fair way to do that? Should there be?
6. What do you think about the "Ten Times" rule? What might be its advantages and disadvantages?

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New Bedford Students Question Decision-Makers About the Economy

By Andrea Mueller and Corinn Williams

At the Workers' Education Program (WEP) in New Bedford, we were very aware that a continued high unemployment rate and layoffs in the local economy have had a dramatic effect on the incomes and opportunities of families in our community. In an effort to incorporate community issues into the curriculum, we have asked students what issues they are concerned about. We work together with other community agencies to address these concerns. Over the past few years, students have overwhelmingly answered that the biggest problem was New Bedford's loss of manufacturing jobs, which is affecting their families, friends, and their neighborhoods.

We decided to design a workshop on questioning strategies developed by the Right Question Project (see article page 4). We built the workshop around students' concerns about the economy using open-ended questions to which we didn't necessarily have the answers. We opened the workshop with a questionnaire in English and Portuguese about students' perception of their economic welfare. Since there was a great range of English proficiency in the classes, it was important to give students the opportunity to speak in their own language. This allowed everyone to participate, and led to very lively discussions.

As a result of the workshop, students wrote letters to elected officials on all levels and invited a state representative to class to ask the questions which they had generated. This was also a good opportunity to engage in a discussion on how to reach decision-makers at different levels of government. Students seemed to be excited by the knowledge that their opinions could be heard.

The following workshop is an example of how students of any level of English can ask questions about complex issues and can take action on a key issue affecting their lives. Asking questions proved to be a useful tool to address economic issues in the community.

August 31, 1995

John Kerry
421 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kerry,

We are the students from the University of Massachusetts Workplace Education Project's citizenship class in New Bedford. We are worried about some things in our community. We have some questions about the economy. What are you doing to bring and keep jobs in the New Bedford area? Why doesn't the government stop cheap products from coming in from other countries? Why are U.S. products so expensive when pay is so low? Why is health insurance so high in cost? Why can't the government provide it? Why do old people in New Bedford have to live in so much poverty?

We would like you to please listen carefully to our concerns and think about these things, because they are very important for all of us and for our children. Please write back to us if you can. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
WEP citizenship class students:

REPUBLICANS WANT A REPEAL OF THE GAS TAX
DEMOCRATS WANT AN INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE
TODAY, THEY OFFERED THE COUNTRY A COMPROMISE —
AN APPEAL TO THE MINIMUM RAGE AND AN INCREASE IN GAS ATTACKS

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WORKSHOP:
Why Is New Bedford Losing Manufacturing Jobs?

Goal: To develop active citizens by validating the opinions and concerns (in English and Portuguese) of economic actors in New Bedford.

Objectives:
- Students will practice asking questions and generate ideas about a public issue.
- Students will become aware of decisions that can cause job loss or job creation.
- Students will develop critical thinking skills about decision-making processes that have directly or indirectly affected them.
- Students will think about their role in the local economy.
- Students will develop a plan to give public input into the local economy.

Lesson Activities:

Introduction to topic

Tell students that we want to do a lesson on the local economy because they have told us over and over again that this is their greatest concern. Tell students that they shouldn't expect to have the answers to questions we pose. Relate this lesson to citizenship and democracy.

Warm-up/Getting into the issue

Have students fill out a questionnaire which looks at "How secure do you feel about your job?" Students fill out the survey and share their thoughts with their neighbor. Follow-up with a group discussion.

Brainstorm

Have students brainstorm the names of factories that have closed in New Bedford during the last ten years. In our classes, students generated the names of about fifteen factories.

Questioning

Organize students into small groups, and have them write their responses to the following questions in English and/or Portuguese on newsprint:

A. Have you ever asked yourself how the job market in New Bedford got to where it is now? Why did this happen?

Examples of responses from our students:
- Jobs went to foreign countries or down south where labor is cheaper.
- NAFTA made companies move to Mexico.
- The tax rate and the cost of doing business for companies in New Bedford is higher than the rate somewhere else.

B. If we knew then, what we know now, what could we have asked decision-makers about the economy? Imagine that all the people who are responsible for the present economic situation are sitting in front of this class. What would you ask them?

Continued on page 19

Campaign Financing

Is Big Money Doing Away With Real Democracy?

By Silja Kallenbach

Is our democracy at risk of becoming a democracy only for those with large amounts of money? Representative Martin Meehan from Lowell, Massachusetts thinks so.

"If a judge were making a decision about whether to continue an inquiry or a hearing and was found to have accepted $124,000 from one of the interested parties, we'd consider the judge corrupt. But we allow our legislators to take that kind of money. It's just not a good way to make important policy decisions," says Meehan.

The main reason why politicians are eager to get contributions is the high cost of running for federal office.

How much Does It Cost to Run for Office?

In 1994, the average cost of winning a seat in the U.S. Senate was $4.4 million. This explains why more than one out of four U.S. Senators are millionaires.

To get elected to the U.S. House of Representatives you do not need to be a millionaire, but you need more than most of us have in our savings accounts. In 1994, successful candidates spent $526,000 on the average.

To get elected to the highest office in the nation has the highest price of them all. In this year's elections, candidates who wanted to have a shot at the presidency needed to raise a minimum of $20 million before a single vote was cast in the primaries. Even with the backing of thousands of voters across the nation, an average citizen would unlikely be able to run a successful presidential campaign.

In order to raise the money they need, congressional representatives have to spend about one third of their time raising money. This means that they have that much less time to focus on the work they were elected to do.

Where Does the Money to Run for Office Come from?

Businesses are prohibited by law from giving money to political candidates. Individual contributions are limited to $1,000 to a presidential candidate (for primary elections only), and $2,000 to a congressional candidate. Thirty-five percent of the money for federal congressional campaigns comes from individual contributions of $200 or more.

The most popular way to get around individual contribution limits is through Political Action Committees (PACs). While most PACs are organized by businesses, others are set up by labor unions and other types of organizations. In 1993-94, $190 million was given to PACs.

In addition, businesses and individuals can give unlimited amounts to political parties, or to issue campaigns. An example of an issue campaign is the campaign by the National Rifle Association to repeal the ban on assault weapons.

As a result, most of the money to political candidates can be traced back to businesses. The next largest sums come from wealthy individuals, many of them corporate executives. Both Democrats and Republicans receive these contributions.

How Does Money Influence Politics?

The fact that businesses regularly give large sums of money to politicians raises some questions; Are the votes of our elected officials swayed by these contributions? Is there a connection between political contributions and votes for tax breaks and subsidies for corporations, or laws that favor a particular group of citizens?

"You can see, in case after case, a clear correlation between the money from special interests and the votes taken by the people who receive the money," says Don Simon of the Common Cause organization. An example is the recent vote to repeal a federal ban on assault weapons by the House of Representatives. A Common Cause study found that the National Rifle Association gave more than $3.6 million over the last ten years to the 239 House members who voted for the repeal.

Another study by Common Cause found that the tobacco industry, which is facing the possibility of new regulations on sales and advertising, gave $4.1 million in 1995 alone to congressional candidates.

Is There a Need for Campaign Finance Reform?

Many organizations and people, including some politicians like Martin Meehan, advocate for reform in how political campaigns are financed. One solution is to put stricter limits on campaign contributions or eliminate PACs. According to Common Cause as well as the Money and Politics Project, that won't work. Their view is that the only way to have "clean" elections is to provide public funding to candidates. To level the playing field, the government should give qualifying candidates an equal amount of money to run their campaign. The Office of Campaign and Political Finance estimates that it would cost about five dollars per voter per year to fund all legislative and statewide elections. The candidates would also have to agree to limit the amount of money they accept.

Other people argue that limits on campaign contributions violate our constitutional right to free speech. They say that giving money to politicians is a way for people to express their opinions, and that the government needs to protect this right. Others are left asking, "What about the right to free speech for the majority of the people in this country who cannot afford to give large contributions to political candidates?"

Sources:
Center for Responsive Politics
Commonwealth Coalition
Common Cause
Boston Globe, April 27, 1996

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does the influence of money on politics matter to you? Why or why not?
2. Do you think people should have the right to give unlimited amounts of money to candidates? Is limiting contributions to political candidates a violation of our right to free speech?
3. What is more important for the preservation of democracy, the right to give unlimited amounts of money to political candidates, or the average citizen's right to have a real shot at running for office?
4. Should political campaigns be publicly financed? Why or why not?
5. What are your congressional representatives' views on this issue? How much did they have to raise to get elected?

~ Silja Kallenbach is the Coordinator of the New England Literacy Resource Center, Boston, MA.

Just How Much Does Foreign Aid Cost Us?

Foreign Aid

By Alex Levin

It doesn't matter whether you're discussing current events in a classroom or a barroom, or even listening to the TV or radio — when it comes to foreign aid, you'll find that a majority of people share the same opinion. Usually the conversation will go as such:

We spend way too much on foreign assistance.
Why is it always up to us?
Foreign assistance doesn't do any good anyway.
If you can't take care of your own, you shouldn't be out there trying to fix up the rest of the world
Besides, who says it's our problem anyway?

And while those arguments may seem to make sense, in reality they are based on half truths and old truths. If we take a moment and examine the validity of each of the above remarks, a very different picture of U.S. economic and humanitarian aid begins to emerge.

Foreign assistance is bleeding the budget dry -- If you agree with that notion, then you are certainly in with the crowd. According to the government's USAID office, a recent poll indicated that the majority of Americans believe that as much as twenty percent of the entire federal budget is spent on economic and humanitarian assistance in other nations. They also believe that we actually spend more money on foreign assistance than on defense or social security.

Contrary to such notions, the United States dedicates about half of one percent of its yearly budget to overseas assistance, excluding the use of military.

In the mid 1980s, there was over 19 billion dollars in the U.S. budget for foreign aid. By 1995, that number had fallen to 13.6 billion. For the current year, continuing the trend downward, 12.1 billion dollars has been budgeted. U.S. foreign assistance in real dollars is now at a new fifty year low.

Why is it always up to us? -- That was a good question to ask back in 1956 when the U.S. accounted for almost 63 percent of all the foreign assistance in the world. Today the U.S. contribution is at 17 percent.

In total dollars, the U.S. now ranks second to Japan in foreign assistance. However, in terms of the percentage of gross national product allocated for foreign aid, the United States ranks last in a listing of the top twenty industrialized nations in the world.

It's just throwing good money after bad -- The notion of U.S. assistance being used to prop up petty dictators held some truth during the cold war, but that is only a small part of the past. Since 1962, more than two dozen countries have moved off the recipient rolls to become U.S. trading partners. One prominent example is South Korea, which imports yearly three times as much in U.S. goods as it received in U.S. aid during all of the 1960s. In all, 47 nations have graduated from U.S. assistance programs. Thirty of them have gone on to become donor nations themselves. Since 1960, the infant mortality rate in developing nations has dropped by half, and primary school enrollment has increased from 48 to 78 percent.

If you can't take care of your own -- Any expenditure on foreign aid is hard to justify by humanitarian reasoning when we consider the poverty that exists in this nation. Yet, what must also be realized is that while foreign aid may cut into some domestic spending, it also creates jobs. Close to 80 percent of USAID's contracts and grants flow back to American firms, which in turn pay the wages of American workers. For ongoing grants and contracts, USAID currently spends:

$0.7 million in New Hampshire
$1.5 million in Maine
$234 million in Connecticut
$640 million in Massachusetts

Not our problem -- Under-developed nations spewing pollution from substandard factories is our problem. Unsanitary conditions lead to cholera and the spread of other diseases; that too is our concern.

Like it or not, the world is an interconnected place. Pain and misery elsewhere in the world is felt in our pocketbooks as well as our hearts. Famine that leads to civil unrest two continents away can cause prices to go up and jobs to be eliminated in our own neighborhoods. Supplying food for a starving Egypt, back in the seventies, was instrumental to the brokering of a lasting peace between that nation and Israel.

If foreign aid were only a measure of a country's sense of empathy, it would make sense to cut back on it, especially when so many of our own citizens are falling below the poverty line. But it has also become a measure of our wisdom. Are we far-sighted enough to make decisions that will help guarantee the security of our nation and families? Are we prepared to enter an era that must, by necessity, be one of global cooperation?

New Bedford Faces Their Problems

Continued from page 17

Examples of responses from our students:

- Why is the tax rate for companies high in New Bedford?
- Why doesn't New Bedford attract other industries or why has New Bedford not been successful in attracting other industries?

C. *To whom should we ask questions about the New Bedford economy? Make a list of elected officials and others.*

D. *Go back to list of questions, and next to each question write the name of the person you would want to ask that particular question.* Example: Why are the water bills so high in New Bedford? Question is for mayor/city government.

Action Plan

How can we contribute to a public debate? Brainstorm ways of talking about the issue publicly. Have students create an action plan.

Examples of Activities: Write letters to the editor, call radio talk shows, ask questions at candidates' debates.

~ Andrea Mueller is a coordinator and teacher at Workers Education Program at University of Massashusetts in Dartmouth. Corinn Williams works for Grassroots Empowerment Training and Unity Project (GETUP).

Gun Control and Crime

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUM:
Seeing All Sides of the Issue of Crime

By Ashley Hager

I am a special needs/ABE teacher in the greater Boston area, and though I have always been deeply concerned about issues such as crime, drugs, and inequality, I have felt ill equipped to address those issues in the classroom. Recently, however, I discovered an invaluable resource for discussing controversial public policy issues with students.

The National Issues Forum (NIF), a nonpartisan group that brings people together to talk about important political issues, publishes information and study materials on a range of public policy issues. The NIF format for using the materials in the classroom provides a structured approach for discussing difficult issues, and for considering multiple perspectives. Students review the problems underlying an issue and examine three or four public policy alternatives. In discussing each of the possible solutions, students achieve a greater understanding of the issue and of the consequences of each alternative. The teacher's role in these forums is as a neutral facilitator, and as a learner.

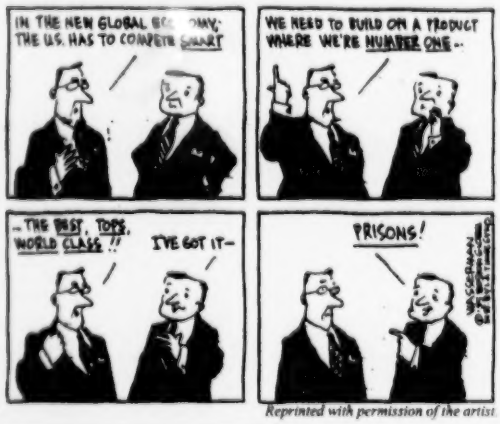
The NIF booklet, *Criminal Justice*, is a very useful resource for looking at the issue of crime. The problem is clearly stated: violent crime is a serious concern, and people have lost faith in the criminal justice system's ability to deal with the problem. Students complete a Pre-Forum Ballot to identify their initial feelings on the issue. Next, three different choices or viewpoints for resolving the problem are examined:

Choice # 1: Get Tougher on Criminals
Criminals believe they will not be caught or punished if they commit a serious crime. We need to make it clear that we will not stand for violent crime.

Choice # 2: Attack Crime at the Roots
We should work on ways to prevent crime by finding solutions to social problems such as poverty, drugs, and unemployment that lead people to turn to crime.

Choice # 3: Target the Violent Few
We should focus on repeat offenders by giving them longer prison sentences.

After reading about the choices, students examine the consequences of each alternative. For example, critics of Choice #1 say that "get tough" measures backfire. Sentencing more people to prison leads to crowding courts and prisons with drug addicts and low-level drug dealers, and leaves less room for serious criminals. Judges are forced to lower sentences for all criminals, and violent criminals get away with light sentences.


IN THE NEW GLOBAL ECONOMY, THE U.S. HAS TO COMPETE SMART
WE NEED TO BUILD ON A PRODUCT WHERE WE'RE NUMBER ONE--
--THE BEST, TOPS, WORLD CLASS !!
I'VE GOT IT--
PRISONS!

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After reading about the issue, students complete a Post Forum Ballot to determine which aspects of each choice they feel most strongly about. They then try to come to a consensus as to which of the three choices, or what combination of the three, they believe would be the best solution. At this point, it is interesting to ask students to reflect on how, after looking at the issue more closely, their initial perceptions have changed.

What I find attractive about the NIF booklets is that by looking at the advantages and disadvantages of possible public policy solutions, students learn to consider different points of view, and to examine the consequences of different actions. These skills can also help students resolve conflict and make decisions in their own lives.

One of my students recently came to the conclusion that, rather than "wimping out" or "backing down", changing his opinion after being exposed to new information was a mature and intelligent approach to problem-solving.

~ Ashley Hager teaches ABE at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA and at the Dearborn Academy in Arlington, MA.

Teachers can order National Issues Forum information booklets in regular or abridged editions, Teacher's Guides, and videos on each of the NIF public policy issues. To receive information and order materials, call 1-800-228-0810.

GUN CONTROL

Gun control is one of the most divisive issues in the Presidential election. The two positions on this issue can be defined as follows:

Pro Gun Control Argument:
The Second Amendment, which protects the rights of Americans to bear arms, was never intended to allow citizens completely unregulated access to guns. Gun control is needed because guns are used to kill people. Mandatory criminal checks and a waiting period on gun purchases are necessary.

Anti Gun Control Argument:
The Second Amendment means that the government should not interfere with this right. People need guns to protect themselves and to prevent crime. Mandatory waiting periods do not reduce homicides.

The two laws that are at the heart of the debate over gun control are:

1. The Brady Handgun Purchase Act which requires a criminal check and a five day waiting period before people can buy handguns.

2. The Assault Weapons Ban which prohibits the transfer, sale, or possession of certain semi-automatic guns.

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT GUN CONTROL AND CRIME

By Marie Horchler

MYTH: Having a gun makes you safe.
FACT: Having a gun makes you less safe and endangers your loved ones. According to a recent study, a gun in the home triples the likelihood of homicide. A gun in the home is 43 times more likely to be used to commit homicide, suicide, or an accidental killing than it is to be used to kill in self-defense.

MYTH: Most violence is racially motivated.
FACT: 83 percent of white victims are slain by white offenders and 94 percent of black victims are slain by black offenders.

MYTH: Guns are regulated enough.
FACT: Guns are an unregulated consumer product in the United States. While teddy bears, toasters, and other consumer products all are subject to strict safety regulations, guns are not.

MYTH: Most murders occur in the course of another felony.
FACT: Only 22 percent of murders are the result of activities such as rape, robbery, or arson. Almost one third of all murders result from arguments.

MYTH: Most gun deaths are homicides.
FACT: In 1991, more Americans died from firearm suicides (18,526) than from firearm homicides (17,746). Between 1968 and 1991, 373,118 American gun deaths were suicides.

MYTH: Guns don't kill, people kill.
FACT: According to the FBI, "When assaults by type of weapon are examined, a gun proves to be seven times more deadly that all other weapons combined." In 1990, over 500 children and youths under 20 were killed by guns in accidental shootings.

Source
Children's Defense Fund

Activity

Write each statement above on a different color paper (e.g. blue = myth, red = fact). Make sure the number of myth/fact pairs corresponds to the number of students. Place the myths and facts in a basket or envelope and have students each pick one. Then ask the students to walk around the room and to read their statement to fellow classmates, asking the students to decide among themselves who has the myth to their fact or the fact to their myth.

Once the students have found their matches, have them place the statements on a wall. All the myths should be in one column and all the corresponding facts should be in an adjacent column. This type of display helps to reinforce the differences between the myths and the facts.

A discussion may follow around what they learned — Had they believed some of the myths and were they surprised by the facts? This activity helps to raise awareness of how myths do influence our thinking.

This activity is easily adapted for other issues. For example, see myths and facts related to immigration on page 23.

~ This activity was adapted from the Health Education and Adult Literacy (HEAL) Project.

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'..And what do you see as the major issue in the upcoming election? ..'

Students Speak Out On Crime

By Ashley Hager

Why has crime in the U.S. become such a problem?

"Illiteracy is a big reason. If a person cannot read or write how else can he live his life? He doesn't have any skills to do a real job."
-- Wayne, 30 years old

"Racism is a real problem! The lack of education about different people causes a lot of hate crimes."
-- Stephan, 25 years old

"Because it's easier to get guns now and there are more drugs. Also people want more things. It has to do with money more than race. Also, teenagers are looking for respect."
-- Jason, 15 years old

What do you think about the Death Penalty?

"No, two wrongs do not make a right. Killing someone for killing is wrong."
-- Margaret, 55 years old

"No because sometimes they get the wrong person."
-- Amicie, 45 years old

"Yes! People who kill should die."
-- India, 18 years old

"No, it's never right to kill. People who get the death penalty are usually from the poorer classes. They do not have the financial backing like the ability to have a good lawyer to help them explain themselves."
-- Wayne, 30 years old

Should people be allowed to carry guns?

"No! people should not be allowed to carry guns because everywhere you go people are killing people for stupid reasons. Fred's boy got shot for no reason right by his house. Now his boys say they will always be strapped (carry guns)."
-- India, 18 years old

"People with no criminal record should be able to carry firearms because it's their Second Amendment right."
-- Nick, 16 years old

~ These comments were made by students at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, and Dearborn Academy in Arlington, Massachusetts. The quotes were compiled by their teacher, Ashley Hager, based on class discussions on crime.

Immigration

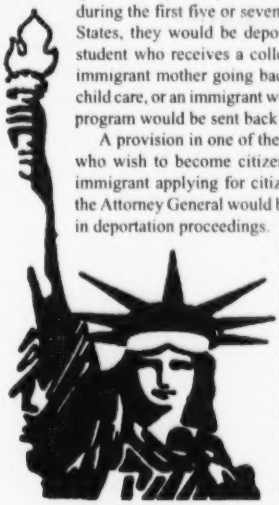
Immigrants Under Attack:

Is New Legislation Punishing Immigrants Unjustly?

By Cathy Anderson

An anti-immigrant backlash has swept the country like wildfire. Immigrants have been portrayed in the media as lazy, dangerous people who do not deserve support during hard times. Politicians blame immigrants for the problems we all share, such as crime, the unstable economy, and a broken health care system. As a result, two bills were passed in March and May that would deny food stamps, health care, Head Start, higher education and other services to immigrants. What the American public does not know is that immigrants pay $25 billion more in taxes than they use in social services. Undocumented immigrants pay about $7 billion in taxes, most of it to Social Security from which they do not benefit.

These federal bills, H.R. 2202 and S. 1664, are described as efforts to stop "illegal immigration," but what they really do is unfairly punish legal immigrant children, students, and their families. For example, if an immigrant uses a publicly funded program for a period of one year during the first five or seven years of residency in the United States, they would be deported. This means an immigrant student who receives a college loan could be deported. An immigrant mother going back to work who uses community child care, or an immigrant worker who enrolls in a job-training program would be sent back to their home country.



A provision in one of the bills would penalize immigrants who wish to become citizens. If there is evidence that an immigrant applying for citizenship has used public benefits, the Attorney General would be directed to place the immigrant in deportation proceedings. This provision would apply even if the immigrant is currently financially stable and not using public benefits. Immigrants who wish to become citizens and exercise their right to vote or run for office would not be able to do so. This bill would weaken the voice of immigrants who have worked to take care of our sick and elderly, who have built the roads and bridges we use and who have started new businesses in our towns and cities.

These bills deny federal programs to legal immigrants by strictly enforcing and expanding the "deeming" process. Deeming is a formal way of counting an immigrant's money when he or she applies for public benefits. Currently, it works this way: To enter the United States legally, immigrants need to show they can support themselves without using public assistance. Many immigrants have a sponsor, someone living in this country who signs a document stating they have enough money to assist the immigrant in case of need. Sometimes, however, an immigrant falls on hard times and needs to use public benefits.

Deeming applies when the agency providing the public benefit adds the sponsor's income to the immigrant's income. If this combined income is above a federally established amount, the immigrant does not qualify for the benefit. Even if the sponsor does not actually help the immigrant, the sponsor's money counts. Because of these restrictions, many immigrants do not qualify for public benefits.

Presently, deeming is applied to AFDC, food stamps, and SSI. However, under the proposed legislation, deeming would also apply to all federal needs-based programs, such as child care, housing, some health care programs, and others. The bill would allow the government to pursue the sponsor for reimbursement of the benefit. And, in most cases, both the sponsor and the immigrant would be at the low-income level, since only very poor immigrants would be eligible for public benefits anyway.

Low-income and poor immigrants are indeed the target of this proposed legislation. The bills would require the sponsors of new immigrants to make 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline. This means that a family of four must earn over $40,000 per year to sponsor two family members. In addition, these anti-immigrant bills would deny undocumented children — the strength and hope of poor immigrant communities — the right to attend public schools.

What the American public does not know is that immigrants pay $25 billion more in taxes than they use in social services.

In a recent letter sent to Senator Diane Feinstein of California, the mayor of San Francisco describes how a day laborer recently discovered that his children had dusted themselves with white flour from head to toe in the hope of making their "brown skin white enough to attend school."

We have an obligation to ourselves as immigrants, as friends and relatives of immigrants, and as responsible members of our community not to give up hope. In December of last year, President Clinton vetoed a Welfare Reform bill that would have denied benefits to immigrants.

In March, widespread community action through personal testimonies, letters, phone calls, and faxes to Congress stopped a bill that would have prevented immigrants from reuniting with their families. We need once again to take action. At some future point, either late this summer or fall, Congress will submit an "immigration reform" bill to President Clinton. The President needs to know that this bill is not good for immigrants, and not good for the country.

Call, write, fax and yell it out:
VETO IMMIGRATION REFORM!
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue,
Washington, DC, 20500
Phone: 202-456-1111 Fax: 202-456-2461

~ Cathy Anderson, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition.

The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship

Excerpted from a speech to new citizens by Judge Reginald Lindsay of the U.S. District Court

It is often said that America is a nation of immigrants. With the exception of the native Americans, we are all immigrants or the children, grand-children, or great-grandchildren of immigrants.

Many of our ancestors stood full of hope and fear at what the new world might hold. Some came to escape political or religious terrors. Some came because their countries no longer offered food or work. Some — like my ancestors — came against their will, carried far from their homelands by slavetraders trafficking human beings. Some came because a friend or relative had paved the way for them, and had sent news that told a story of a better life in America.

What does it mean to be an American? It means that you are afforded the opportunity to share in and benefit from America's wealth and power. But being an American also means that you must support and defend the Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution is the blueprint for our system of democracy. It sets out the structure for our government and provides certain rights to all citizens. The dedication of you and your fellow Americans to honor it is our only guarantee that we will remain a free nation. In the United States Constitution, there are three branches of our government: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. This system is designed to ensure that no particular individual or groups of individuals can take control of this country away from us, the people.

As a citizen, you have the right to play a role in each of these branches of government. As for the executive branch, for example, you decide who will be President of the United States. As for the judicial branch, you decide how disputes between your fellow citizens or between the government and your fellow citizens should be resolved.

In exchange for this great opportunity you assume certain responsibilities. The Constitution can only work if each citizen shoulders his or her share of the burden. It is designed to ensure that the voices of the few and the powerful can never drown out the voices that speak of the men and women like you and me.

Your part of this covenant is first that you must raise your voice, and make your desires known in the voting booth. Your vote is what gives life to our democracy and makes our system work. You must also be willing to serve on juries. The jury system is our best hope of assuring that in civil and criminal trials the outcome is not determined by a few powerful individuals, but by people like you who represent the collective conscience of the community.

This is the covenant with America: to participate in the decisions made in all its branches of government. In return, America will give you its most cherished blessing, a free country with a free people. America is not a perfect country. Its people are not a perfect people. What you can take comfort and pride in, however, is that she continues to strive for perfection. This country is a work in progress.

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS

By Silja Kallenbach

MYTH: The United States is being taken over by foreign-born people who are moving here in droves.

FACT: Only about 8% of the people living in the U.S. were born in other countries. In 1910, there were twice as many foreign born people. (Some of them may have been your grandparents.)

MYTH: Most immigrants come to the U.S. illegally.

FACT: 85% of immigrants come to the U.S. legally.

MYTH: Immigrants don't care about this country.

FACT: Immigrants pay taxes, and many choose to serve in the military; 77% want to become citizens.

MYTH: Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy.

FACT: Legal immigrants pay about $25 billion more in taxes than they use in social services. Undocumented immigrants pay about $7 billion in taxes, much of it to Social Security from which they do not benefit.

MYTH: Most immigrants come to the U.S. because they want to receive welfare.

FACT: Most immigrants come here to work. Only about 2% of immigrants are on welfare as compared to 3.7% of working-age native-born Americans.

MYTH: Migration is the main cause of economic inequality in the United States.

FACT: The gap between the rich and the poor is one of the highest in industrialized nations and growing. One percent of the U.S. population earn 40% of private wealth. Chief Executive Officers earn an average of $2,100 per hour which is 183 times the average worker's pay. This inequality can hardly be blamed on immigrants.

Sources:
National Immigration Forum
The Urban Institute
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
National Mortgage Association

See page 21 for Myth/Fact Activity instructions.

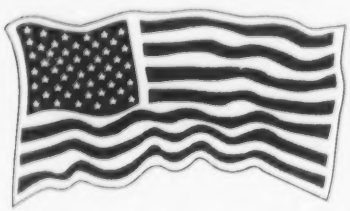
VERA

Vera is a New England wide effort to help adult learners and their teachers become informed about political and economic literacy issues that affect their well-being. VERA's goal is to increase the level of informed civic participation, and voting in particular. VERA provides teaching resources and models that integrate political and economic literacy issues while also developing academic skills.

The New England Literacy Resource Center applauds the 124 education programs who have joined VERA. In joining this effort, teachers have agreed to make the commitment to integrate these issues into classroom activities and to facilitate student voter registration. While the immediate focus will be on the upcoming elections, we expect that VERA continue well beyond November 1996.

We will be reporting on results and the experiences of teachers and students in a future issue of *The Change Agent*.

There may still be time for you to join VERA! Check the voter registration deadlines below. Only adult education programs and teachers in New England are eligible to join VERA.



Registration Deadlines

Connecticut	November 4
Maine	November 5
Massachusetts	October 16
New Hampshire	October 26
Rhode Island	October 5
Vermont	October 26

Yes, I want to join the New England Adult Learner Voter Education, Registration and Action campaign (VERA)!

Program or teacher name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____
Phone: _____
Contact person: _____

In signing up to join VERA, we make a commitment to:

1. Incorporate political and economic literacy issues into instruction in one or more classes during the months and weeks preceding the November elections.
2. Facilitate voter registration of eligible program participants either on site or via mail or other means.
3. Collect data on how many students were registered to vote and how many actually voted in November, and share with NELRC.

The VERA campaign makes a commitment to:

1. Provide your program with a packet of teaching resources and voter registration information in your state upon your request. There is a $10 fee per packet for the mailing and production costs.
2. Help locate information and teaching resources on topics not covered in the packet upon the teacher's request.
3. Share information on what we have learned, and the campaign results for each participating state in New England.

Please return a copy of this form with a $10 check made out to NELRC/ World Education to: NELRC/World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210